

Lake Michigan Fisheries Team
April 2, 2003
Plymouth Service Center

Draft Notes

Next meeting: June 11, 2003. FWS offices, 2661 Scott Tower Drive, New Franken, WI.

Present: Steve Hogler, Justine Hasz, Phil Moy (UW Sea Grant), Pradeep Hirethota, John Janssen (UW-Milwaukee), Terry Lychwick, Brad Eggold, George Boronow, Mark Opgenorth, Randy Link, Paul Peeters, Al Kaas, Lee Meyers, Mike Toney, Al Niebur, Matt Coffaro, Dick Rebicek.

Procedural note: The LMFT charge calls for policy recommendations to be discussed twice before being advanced to the Guidance Team. The discussions may take place at two Team meetings, or, when time is short, the LMFT Policy Committee may advance recommendations without a second discussion by the full team. These notes describe policy recommendations regarding steelhead production, sucker contracts, white perch harvest under rough and detrimental fish contracts, and the white perch gill net study. Each of those recommendations was reviewed by the Policy Committee (Bill Horns, Brad Eggold, Matt Coffaro, Lee Meyers, and Mike Toney) on April 10, and all were endorsed except the one pertaining to rough and detrimental fish contracts (see item 4, below).

1. NRDA project funding

Background. At the March 12 LMFT meeting, the Team developed a “Vision and Priorities” statement. The goal of the April 2 meeting was to develop a ranked list of specific project ideas.

Action. The Team ranked project ideas under three headings, “Fisheries Enhancement”, “Habitat”, and “Land Acquisition”. Individuals accepted responsibility for developing project briefs following the established format, and Bill Horns agreed to draft a cover memo that places the projects in a context of existing plans (LMIFMP, Lower Fox RAP, etc) and highlights highly-perturbed nature of the Green Bay ecosystem, the over-riding importance of achieving stability and predator/prey balance, and, therefore, the central role of predator stocking. We set a goal of completing the package by April 30. The project ideas were ranked as follows, with project authors shown in parentheses:

Fisheries Enhancement

1. Wild Rose SFH renovation, phase 1 (Al Kaas)
2. Wild Rose SFH renovation, phase 2 (Al Kaas)
3. Spotted musky restoration, management activities (Terry Lychwick)
4. Strawberry Creek flow enhancement (Mark Opgenorth)
5. Development of second barrier to upstream migration on Lower Fox River (Terry Lychwick)
6. Sturgeon lift and sorting facility on Menominee River (Tom Meronek)
7. Thunder River rearing house repair (Mark Opgenorth)
8. Walleye rearing ponds, management activities (Mike Toney)
9. Cold water production engineering study to address GB stocking needs (Al Kaas)
10. Structure(s) to protect sturgeon during downstream passage on Menominee River (Tom Meronek)
11. Experiment to assess effects of cormorant control (Bill Horns)

Habitat

1. Reconnaissance of nearshore habitat in GB to identify restoration opportunities (Justine Hasz)
2. Reconnaissance of habitat in GB tributaries to identify restoration opportunities (Justine Hasz)
3. Review data/literature to develop a GB ecosystem restoration goal consistent with past ecosystem structure and present constraints.

Land Acquisition

1. Purchase, restoration, and protection of fish habitat in Keyes Creek (Mike Toney)
2. Purchase and/or protection of wetland habitat surrounding Strawberry Creek (Paul Peeters)
3. Purchase, restoration, and protection of fish habitat in Hiens Creek, (Mike Toney)

2. Steelhead production

Background. At the last LMFT meeting we recommended cutting steelhead production at Kettle Moraine Springs SFH by 150,000, starting with the 2003 year class, and move 75,000 of those fish to Wild Rose, displacing a like number of seeforellen brown trout. This would mean a net cut of 75,000 yearling steelhead and 75,000 yearling seeforellen brown trout. Steve Fajfer and the Wild Rose crew recommended not displacing the brown trout at Wild Rose, so we reconsidered the earlier recommendation.

Action. The Team adopted the following recommendation: a) For the 2003 year class, reduce KMS production by 150,000 yearlings. The reduction should include 50,000 of each strain, subject to egg availability. b) Do not raise steelhead or cut seeforellen production at WR. c) Explore the possibility of swapping some of our yearling seeforellen brown trout for yearling Skamania steelhead from Indiana. d) Look to Team Nearshore for advice regarding distribution of 2003 year class steelhead. e) Defer planning for the 2004 year class until later this summer. [This recommendation was ratified by the Policy Committee on April 10.]

3. Sucker contracts

Background. A number of people have been working on developing new contracts for commercial harvest of suckers from tributaries. Justine asked for LMFT consideration of a) whether or not to issue a permit on the Oconto River and b) if so, how large the harvest should be.

Action. The Team recommended development of a cooperative agreement with Bob Kunze or by competitive bid if other harvesters are interested, with the following provisions: a) Harvested suckers will not be sold for human consumption. b) Kunze will capture suckers on the upstream run and provide eggs, as available, to the Department. c) Harvest limit of 250,000 pounds. [This recommendation was ratified by the Policy Committee on April 10.]

4. White perch – harvest under rough and detrimental fish contracts

Background. Commercial fishers are interested in harvesting white perch, and we have stated a desire to facilitate a white perch fishery as long as yellow perch and other species are adequately protected. A committee made up of Terry Lychwick, Justine Hasz, Tom Hansen, and Mike Kitt was formed to review options, and recommended increasing the allowed white perch harvest under contracts for the removal of non-quota rough and detrimental fish.

Action. The Team recommended modification of the rough and detrimental fish contracts to allow any license holder to harvest unlimited numbers of white perch using presently legal gill nets and trap nets with existing regulations, as long as the fisher has not harvested more than 90% his/her yellow perch quota. [Because the white perch committee subsequently recommended reconsidering this issue, the Policy Committee did not ratify the LMFT recommendation described here.]

5. White perch – funding of gear study

Background. The Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum has asked Secretary Hassett to authorize the use of \$15,000 from the \$200,000 reserved for Green Bay yellow perch restoration to fund a monitor in the study of experimental gill nets for white perch on Green Bay.

Action. The team recommended denying the use of those funds for that purpose for the following reasons: 1) The study would not help yellow perch. The purpose of the funds, and one of the

arguments for the study, is to help yellow perch restoration. However, we have no reason to believe that the commercial harvest of white perch would help restore yellow perch. 2) We have generally argued in the past that special studies to expand commercial fishing should be funded from outside the Department, by commercial fishers or interested scientists. 3) The use of these funds for this purpose would result in less money being available to for yellow perch studies recommended by the new Green Bay Fisheries Research Group. Since the Forum recommended that the expenditure of those funds be guided by that group, the funds should be saved until the GBFRG develops its recommendations. [This recommendation was ratified by the Policy Committee on April 10.]

6. Policy regarding retention of non-target species caught in trap nets

Background. A long-standing issue of interest to both commercial and sport fishers is the possibility of allowing commercial fishers to retain some of the lake trout caught incidentally in gill nets and trap nets. The new LMIFMP discusses this issue and includes this tactic: “Explore alternatives to the current law prohibiting commercial harvest of incidentally caught lake trout”. This issue is under discussion by a committee of the Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum. During hearings on the proposed rule to allow summer trap netting in Zone 3, sport fishers expressed the concern that, if summer trap netting were allowed and subsequently the retention of incidentally caught lake trout were allowed, commercial fishers who hold whitefish quotas in Zone 3 but do not now set trap nets would begin running trap nets. To address this concern, Brad Eggold drafted a policy statement for consideration by the LMFT. The draft statement declared that the Department would not allow the harvest of non-target species, except rough or detrimental species, caught in trap or pound nets.

Action. Opinions of Team members were mixed. The Team did not endorse the policy statement.